



Blind Citizens Australia

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New South Wales

Toolkit

Revised edition (2014)

Welcome to BCA's New South Wales Toolkit.

Introduction

Navigating the maze of services to find what you need, as well as being aware of the benefits you are entitled to as someone who is blind or vision impaired, can be a complex and frustrating process which can go on for months or even years if you do not have access to accurate, accessible and timely information about benefits and services. With its comprehensive toolkits, Blind Citizens Australia has come to your rescue!

Blind Citizens Australia have produced a toolkit for each Australian State and Territory, containing all the information you need about the services, benefits and entitlements available to you no matter where you live, and those which apply to each specific state.

For those who have recently lost their sight, or for those moving from one State or Territory to another, finding which benefits, entitlements and services you may be eligible for can be a daunting process.

Having access to these comprehensive tool kits will enable you to prepare before you move, and provide you with a permanent prompt that reminds you where to go for help and what is available to you. Everything from Centrelink benefits to recreational services is covered in these comprehensive guides for each state.

You can obtain a copy of the toolkit in your preferred format by contacting Blind Citizens Australia's head office on (03) 9654 1400, or toll free, on 1800 033 660 or by downloading it from our website www.bca.org.au

Knowledge is power, and Blind Citizens Australia seeks to empower all Australians who are blind or vision impaired by making these tool kits available. The world of services and benefits, explained in easy to read language, is now at your fingertips, in your ears, or on a computer screen near you!

Disclaimer:

The content in this toolkit, and its associated fact sheets, have been developed to reflect the benefits, entitlements and services available to people who are blind and vision impaired. All content is of a general nature and for personal informational use only. Although every effort has been made to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the toolkits content at the time of publication, users are urged to check independently on matters of specific interest as content is subject to change without notice.

If you would like to provide comment on the content of the toolkit, either due to unintentional error or omission, please contact BCA's National Office on the following details:

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1. Advocacy and Legal Support

Administrative Appeals Tribunal

The Administrative Appeals Tribunal can review a wide range of administrative decisions made by Ministers of the Australian Government, government departments, agencies and authorities and other tribunals. In limited circumstances, the Tribunal can review administrative decisions made by state government and non-government bodies.

Phone: 1300 366 700

Website: www.aat.gov.au

Australian Centre for Disability Law

The Australian Centre for Disability Law is a specialist Community Legal Centre which promotes and protects the rights of people with a disability by providing free legal advice and representation in disability discrimination cases.

Phone: (02) 9370 3135

Website: www.disabilitylaw.org.au

Australian Human Rights Commission

The Australian Human Rights Commission can investigate and resolve complaints of discrimination based on a person's sex, disability, race, age or sexual preference.

Phone: 1300 656 419

Website: www.hreoc.gov.au

Community Legal Centres

Community Legal Centres offer a range of legal and related services to their client community, including information and referral, legal advice, case work, advocacy and legal representation. To locate your

nearest Community Legal Centre contact Community Legal Centres NSW.

Phone: (02) 9212 733

Website: www.clcnsw.org.au

Law Access NSW

Law Access NSW operates a free telephone service which provides legal information, referral and in some cases, legal advice.

Phone: 1300 888 529

Website: www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au

NSW Anti-Discrimination Board

The Anti-Discrimination Board can investigate and work towards resolving breaches of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act.

Phone: (02) 9268 5544

Website: www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au

Public Interest Advocacy Centre

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) can provide legal advice and representation on issues which have a public interest; particularly where a decision or practice negatively impacts on a number of people who are subject to economic disadvantage.

Phone: (02) 8898 6500

Website: www.piac.asn.au

Social Security Appeals Tribunal

The Social Security Appeals Tribunal provides an appeals mechanism for reviewing decisions made by the Department of Human Services (Centrelink).

Phone: 1800 011 140

Website: www.sat.gov.au

2. Service Providers for Blindness and Vision Impairment

Association of Blind Citizens of NSW Inc

The Association of Blind Citizens of NSW is a consumer based organisation which aims to improve the quality of life for all people who are blind or vision impaired in NSW. The association provides support and training, advocacy services, recreational opportunities and a number of referral options.

Phone: (02) 9744 1516

Website: www.asnblind-nsw.org.au

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA)

Blind Citizens Australia is the peak national representative organisation of Australians who are blind or vision impaired. The organisation provides an information and advocacy service that can be accessed free of charge. BCA members also receive regular publications to keep them informed about different issues that may affect them and have access to a range of peer support opportunities.

Phone: 1800 033 660

Website: www.bca.org.au

Deaf Blind Association (NSW)

The Deaf Blind Association advocates on behalf of people who are deafblind and encourages self-advocacy amongst its members. The organisation also conducts a range of social and recreational activities.

Phone: (02) 9744 0160

Website: www.dbansw.org.au

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT

In addition to providing Guide Dogs, Guide Dogs NSW/Act trains people to use canes and electronic aids to improve their mobility and quality of life. All of these services are delivered to clients free of charge.

Phone: (02) 9412 9300

Website: www.guidedogs.com.au

Macular Degeneration Foundation

The foundation is a national organisation based in Sydney, meeting the needs of the macular degeneration community across Australia. Programs are directed towards education, awareness, early detection and treatments, support services and representation.

Phone: 1800 111 709

Website: www.mdfoundation.com.au

Retina Australia

Retina Australia is committed to raising funds for research into the detection, prevention, treatment and cure of inherited retinal dystrophies. Through its state member organisations, crucial support and information is provided to the newly-diagnosed and to those whose vision is deteriorating.

Phone: 1800 999 870

Website: www.retinaaustralia.com.au

Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC)

The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) provides quality and innovative education and other services to achieve the

best outcomes for current and future generations with hearing and/or vision loss throughout Australia.

Phone: (02) 9871 1233

Website: www.ridbc.org.au

Vision Australia

Vision Australia's services are tailored to a person's level of vision and touch every aspect of a person's life. These services include adaptive technology training, Braille training, training in the use of a Seeing Eye Dog or cane, independent living services such as occupational therapy, employment services, library services, advocacy and peer support. Most of these services are delivered free of charge.

Phone: 1300 847 466

Website: www.visionaustralia.org

3. Education Benefits and Services

Australian Disability and Indigenous Peoples' Education Fund

This fund was set up to assist indigenous and non-indigenous people with a disability to participate in education programs through small grants of up to \$2500. Grants are provided every sixth months with applications being considered at the end of March and September each year.

Phone: (03) 9429 4210

Website: www.adipef.org.au

Austudy

Austudy provides financial assistance to individuals aged 25

and above who are studying full-time or undertaking an apprenticeship. To claim Austudy, you will also have to have been living in Australia as an Australian resident for a minimum of two years. For further information, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Education Entry Payment

If you are already receiving a payment such as the Disability Support Pension or Newstart Allowance and are enrolled in an approved course, you may be eligible to receive the Education Entry Payment to help cover your study costs. Your eligibility for this payment will be determined when you provide Centrelink with proof of enrolment in an approved course. For further information, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Newstart Allowance

If you are aged 22 or over and are currently looking for work, studying or training, you may be eligible to receive the Newstart allowance. If you have not yet completed year 12 or an equivalent certificate II course, you will be required to undertake further training before being considered eligible for the Newstart Allowance. For further information, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Pensioner Education Supplement

The Pensioner Education Supplement is available to individuals already receiving a pension such as the Disability Support Pension,

Disability Support Pension (blind) and the Carer's Payment. The supplement aims to assist recipients with the cost of full or part-time study. For further information, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Quantum Reading Learning Vision Print Disability Scholarship Program

This program awards adaptive technology prizes to successful scholarship applicants on an annual basis. Winners may choose the form of adaptive technology that will best suit their needs from a set prize list, which includes:

- Desktop and handheld electronic magnifiers
- Text-to-speech devices
- Book readers
- Daisy players/recorders
- Magnification and screen reading software

You must be a permanent Australian resident with a print disability to apply for this scholarship program and must also fit into one of the following categories:

- Primary education
- Secondary education
- Tertiary education/TAFE

To apply for the program, you must fill in an application form and attach a supporting letter explaining in 500 words, how having a print disability affects you and how the adaptive technology offered under the program would assist you in your studies.

Phone: (02) 9479 3100

Website: www.quantumrlv.com.au

Student Support

Some further education providers such as TAFE and University provide special assistance for students with a disability. Students may be eligible to receive course material in an accessible format and may also seek extensions with assessment tasks or special provisions for exams to allow them to complete their studies in a fair and equitable manner.

To find out more, simply phone the TAFE or University you wish to enrol in and ask to speak to a Disability Liaison Officer or Teacher Consultant for Vision Impairment.

TAFE Fee Exemption

Students receiving a Disability Support Pension (through the Department of Human Services (Centrelink), or the Department of Veterans' Affairs), or who are a client of a Teacher/Consultant for Students with a Disability are eligible to receive a full fee exemption for one TAFE NSW course per year. They are also eligible for the concession fee for subsequent enrolments in that year. The concession fee as for January 2012 was \$53. Apprentices are required to pay a capped fee per year for their course. The capped fee as of January 2012 was \$436.

Vision Australia Further Education Bursary

Each year, Vision Australia awards further education bursaries to a select number of students who are blind or vision impaired to assist them in purchasing adaptive technology to assist them in their studies. Bursaries are available to students of any age, who are enrolling to study in a certificate IV TAFE course or higher, or an under-graduate or post-graduate degree through university.

Talk to staff at Vision Australia about the application requirements for the further education bursary, and upcoming bursary application dates.

Phone: 1300 847 466

Website: www.visionaustralia.org/living-with-low-vision/learning-to-live-independently/further-education-support/vision-australia-further-education-bursary

4. Employment Benefits and Services

Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program

Australian Apprentices with disability and their employers may be eligible to receive additional assistance under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program. A range of assistance is available to support Australian Apprentices with disability, including Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support which is paid to employers, and assistance for tutorial, interpreter and mentor services for apprentices.

Phone: 13 38 73 (Australian Apprenticeships referral line).

Disability Employment Services

Disability Employment Services (DES) are located across the country and specialise in finding people with disability employment in the real world, for real wages alongside people who do not have disability.

Disability Employment Services also maintain a long-term relationship with both employees and employers to help meet any challenges that might arise down the track. Work can be part-time or full-time and is suited to your skills and abilities. For further information contact Disability Employment Australia.

Phone: (03) 9012 6000

Website: www.disabilityemployment.org.au

Employment Assistance Fund

Formerly known as the Workplace Modifications Scheme, this scheme is funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide people with a disability with the equipment that they need to be able to function in the workplace – such as CC-TVs, Braille note takers and screen-reading software. The Employment Assistance Fund is open to job-seekers who are registered with an employment service provider, and to people who are employed for a minimum of eight hours work per week.

5. Entertainment Benefits and Services

Cinema

Audio description is becoming increasingly available in cinemas across Australia. When accessing audio description, patrons are provided with a small receiver and headset to allow them to use the service in a private and dignified manner. For more information, contact your cinema or Blind Citizens Australia.

Phone: 1800 033 660 (BCA)

DVD

Many commercially available DVDs include an audio described track for people who are blind or vision impaired. If a title has audio description, it will often include text on the back of the case such as “audio described”, “DTS”, “audio narration” or “narration for the visually impaired”. Most DVDs will also include the following logo:



Website: <http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/dvds/equipment-reviews-and-how-to-videos/how-to-identify-a-dvd-that-has-access-features>

Media Access Australia keeps a comprehensive list of titles available with audio description.

Website: www.mediaaccess.org.au

Most public libraries will also stock a number of audio described DVDs.

Film and Television

Audio description (AD) makes it possible for people who are blind or vision impaired to follow and enjoy many mainstream movies and TV shows. AD is the verbal representation of visual elements of a movie, TV show, live performance or tour. Information is provided between natural pauses and dialogue and aims to give the blind consumer an understanding of elements such as scenes, costumes, facial expressions and actions.

Reading

All Vision Australia clients are eligible to loan books from the Vision Australia Information Library Service. The list of titles is growing all the time and there are a range of different formats to choose from, including audio and Braille. Vision Australia can also assist you in finding a talking book player that will meet your needs.

Additionally, Vision Australia clients are eligible to have 360 pages of text transcribed into an alternate format each year.

Phone: (03) 9864 9600 (Existing Vision Australia Library clients)

Phone: 1300 847 466 (New library clients)

Website: www.visionaustralia.org

Most public libraries also have a wide range of audio books available for loan. Contact your local library for more information.

Television

There are currently two talking set-top boxes on the market that provide speech output for the benefit of people who are blind or vision impaired. Speech output allows consumers to know what channel they are on, what program is currently airing and be able to access a full electronic program guide independently. Both the Hills talking set-top box and the Bush talking set-top box sell for around \$200 and are available through Vision Australia or direct from the manufacturer. For more information or to purchase a talking set-top box, see below contacts.

Phone: 1300 847 466 (Vision Australia), (02) 9714 3434 (Bush Australia) or 1800 68 50 32 (Hills Tech Life)

Theatre and the Arts

Vision Australia has a number of volunteers who dedicate their time to describing live theatre for the benefit of patrons who are blind or vision impaired. In NSW, this service currently operates in Sydney only, to find out more, contact Vision Australia.

Phone: 1300 847 466

Website: www.visionaustralia.org.au (for upcoming performances)

Additionally, cassettes, CD's or MP3s providing narrative description of visual information can be accessed at many attractions around NSW.

The following venues offer audio described tours:

- Australian Museum
- Art Gallery of NSW
- Cremorne Point Reserve on Sydney Harbour
- Museum of Contemporary Art
- Powerhouse Museum

The NSW Companion Card is also available to assist people to access ticketed events – including movies, live performances and concerts. The Companion Card Scheme recognises the need for

some people to have an attendant or carer accompany them to such events and allows the cardholder to have their companion attend free of charge.

If you hold a NSW Companion Card and have specific seating requirements, such as needing to sit nearer to the front of the stage if you still have some remaining vision, or needing a seat which does not require you to negotiate stairs if you have additional mobility difficulties, you may be able to purchase your concert or theatre tickets the day before they go on sale to ensure that you get a suitable seat. Arrangements differ between booking agents and venues, so the best thing to do is make enquiries to discuss your requirements prior to tickets going on sale.

Phone: 1800 893 044

Website: www.nswcompanioncard.org.au

6. Aids and Equipment Benefits and Services

Aids and Equipment Program

The Aids and Equipment Program (also known as PADP) is funded by the NSW Department of Health and aims to subsidise the cost of equipment for people with a disability. The program funds aids such as Brailers, talking diaries, CC TVs and other adaptive technology.

Children and adults with a permanent disability are able to apply for funding through the Aids and Equipment Program. In the event that funding is granted, the recipient will be asked to pay a \$100 co-contribution (or up to 20% of the total price for higher income earners). To be considered for this program you will need to obtain a referral from a medical practitioner and a prescription for the intended aid or piece of equipment from an occupational therapist.

Phone: 1800 362 253

Website: www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au

Employment Assistance Fund

Formerly known as the Workplace Modifications Scheme, this scheme is funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide people with a disability with the equipment that they need to be able to function in the workplace – such as CC-TVs, Braille note takers and screen-reading software. The Employment Assistance Fund is open to job-seekers who are registered with an employment service provider, and to people who are employed for a minimum of eight hours work per week.

All individuals wishing to access Employment Assistance funding will be subject to a Job Access assessment, where the individual is assessed within the work context to identify the equipment that would best meet their needs.

Phone: 1800 464 800

Website: www.jobaccess.gov.au

Lions Visual Independence Adaptive Technology Grants

Lions Visual Independence is currently offering grant opportunities for the ID Mate Talking Barcode Scanner and the Kapten Plus GPS.

Phone: 1300 787 469

Website: www.visualindependence.org.au

Low Cost PCs

A joint partnership between not-for-profit organisation WorkVentures and Centrelink makes it possible for Centrelink customers to access low cost refurbished computers. There are three different types of computer packages to choose from: laptop, desktop with peripherals or desktop only. Computer packages start from \$300. To find out more about the different computer packages available contact WorkVentures.

Phone: 1800 112 205

Website: www.workventures.com.au

NVDA (Non-Visual Desktop Access)

Developed by NV Access, NVDA is an open screen reader for Windows that provides computer access for people who are blind or vision impaired through synthetic speech. The software can run entirely from USB with no installation required and is also compatible with many refreshable Braille devices.

Phone: (07) 5667 8372

Website: www.nvda-project.org

Quantum Reading Learning Vision Print Disability Scholarship Program

This program awards adaptive technology prizes to successful scholarship applicants on an annual basis. Winners may choose the form of adaptive technology that will best suit their needs from a set prize list, which includes:

- Desktop and handheld electronic magnifiers
- Text-to-speech devices
- Book readers
- Daisy players/recorders
- Magnification and screen reading software

You must be a permanent Australian resident with a print disability to apply for this scholarship program and must also fit into one of the following categories:

- Primary education
- Secondary education
- Tertiary education/TAFE

To apply for the program, you must fill in an application form and attach a supporting letter explaining in 500 words, how having a print disability affects you and how the adaptive technology offered under the program would assist you in your studies.

To obtain an application form or to find out more about the program, contact Quantum Reading Learning Vision.

Phone: (02) 9479 3100

Website: www.quantumrlv.com.au

Quantum Reading Learning Vision Seniors Grant

As with the scholarship program, there are a number of prizes available including electronic magnifiers, screen reading software and daisy players. To apply for the program, you will need to complete an application form and state in 50 words or less how having a print disability affects you in your daily life and how the prizes on offer would assist you to do the things that you miss the most. To obtain an application form or to find out more about the grant, contact Quantum Reading Learning Vision.

Phone: (02) 9479 3100

Website: www.quantumrlv.com.au

TAD Computer Support Service

TAD Disability Services provides refurbished Windows desktop computers and laptops to people with a disability at a minimal cost. All packages include peripherals such as mouse and keyboard, a 19" LCD monitor (with the exception of the laptop package) and a genuine pre-installed version of Microsoft Home and Student. Your computer will be delivered to your door at no additional cost and comes with two years of support.

Phone: (02) 9912 3400

Website: www.tadnsw.org.au

TAD Custom Designed Equipment Service

TAD Disability Services provides a unique service to provide innovative equipment solutions for people with a disability. Volunteers construct assistive devices that are not available on the mainstream

market to meet the client's particular needs. In some cases, a mainstream product is used and is modified to produce an accessible version. Assistive devices are used in all aspects of life, such as personal care, mobility, daily living, work, computing and recreation. The client is required to cover the cost of any materials required to produce their assistive device, in addition to a small fee for labour. If there is a task that you are having difficulty with due to your disability and you can't find a solution on the market, contact TAD NSW.

Phone: (02) 9912 3400

Website: www.tadnsw.org.au

Vision Australia Further Education Bursary

Each year, Vision Australia awards further education bursaries to a select number of students who are blind or vision impaired to assist them in purchasing adaptive technology to assist them in their studies. Bursaries are available to students of any age who are enrolling to study in a certificate IV TAFE course or higher, or an under-graduate or post-graduate degree through university. Talk to staff at Vision Australia about application requirements and upcoming bursary application dates.

Phone: 1300 847 4666

Website: www.visionaustralia.org

7. Financial Support

All of the payments listed in this resource are administered by the Department of Human Services, formerly known as Centrelink. To find out more about a particular support payment, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Age Pension (blind)

To be eligible for this pension, you must:

- Be an Australian citizen or hold permanent resident status
- Have resided in Australia for the last ten years
- Be of legally blind status, as determined by a health professional. The definition of “legal blindness in Australia is visual acuity (clarity) of no greater than 6/60 and/or a visual field of no greater than 10 degrees after correction”.
- If male, be at least 65 years of age
- If female and born before 1949, be at least 62 years of age
- If female and born after 1949, be at least 65 years of age

While income received from the Age Pension (blind) is considered as taxable income, it is assessed differently to the Aged Pension. If you are already on the Age Pension, it may be beneficial to speak to someone at Centrelink about transferring to the Age Pension (blind) as it may better suit your circumstances.

By quoting your pension number, you may also be entitled to subsidies for gas, water, electricity and a range of other services.

Age Pension vs. Disability Support Pension (blind) – What are the differences?

The following information is based on an article by Aileen McFadzean which was published in the September 2004 edition of BC News. The information was reviewed in October 2012 to include the most up-to-date information.

People who receive the Disability Support Pension (DSP) (blind) do not have to change to the Age Pension (blind) at retirement age.

The DSP (blind) is available without means testing and is not a taxable benefit for individuals of working age. However, the DSP (blind) can be considered as income when calculating for additional supplements such as rent assistance. A rate calculation considering income and assets is made and compared to a rate calculation that is

not means tested. The higher of the two rates is paid if the individual is eligible.

When an individual reaches retirement age the payments for DSP (blind) and Age Pension (blind) are the same; both pensions are taxable and must be included as taxable income.

There are some advantages and disadvantages to both pensions. In order to receive payments such as the Pensioner Education Supplement or Education Entry Payment, a person needs to be on the DSP (blind), as a person on the Age Pension (blind) will not be considered eligible for these allowances.

The DSP (blind), however, has limited portability. From January 2013, customers who receive DSP (blind) can be absent from Australia for up to 6 weeks; although individuals who are totally blind may apply for indefinite portability. The Age Pension (blind) allows individuals to travel overseas for up to 6 months while receiving their pension (supplementary payments such as rent assistance reduce after 6 weeks).

If you do not want to be changed to the Age Pension (blind) you should contact Centrelink prior to reaching Age Pension age. If the change has automatically happened, you can appeal the cancellation of the DSP (blind). You have 13 weeks from the date that you were advised of the cancellation to appeal if you have been financially disadvantaged and want arrears to be paid.

Austudy

Austudy provides financial assistance to individuals aged 25 and above who are studying full-time or undertaking an apprenticeship. To claim Austudy, you will also have to have been living in Australia as an Australian resident for a minimum of two years.

Carer Allowance

If you are a parent or carer that provides daily support to a child or adult with a disability, you may be eligible to receive the Carer Allowance. The Carer Allowance is a supplementary payment that is not subject to an income and assets test. It can be paid in addition to wages or other support payments such as the Carer Payment or Parenting Payment.

Carer Payment

If you are a carer who is unable to support yourself through substantial participation in the workforce due to the demands of your caring role, you may be eligible to receive the Carer Payment.

Disability Support Pension (blind)

To be eligible for the Disability Support Pension (blind), you must:

- Be permanently legally blind. The definition of “legal blindness in Australia is visual acuity (clarity) of no greater than 6/60 and/or a visual field of no greater than 10 degrees after correction”.
- Be over the age of 16 and under the Aged Pension age
- Be an Australian citizen or hold permanent resident status
- Have been residing in Australia continuously for ten years (unless your permanent blindness occurred in Australia)

If you are deemed eligible to receive the Disability Support Pension (blind), you are entitled to receive the maximum pension rate. While this pension is income and assets test free, any allowances you are paid in addition to DSP (blind) such as Rent Assistance will be subject to income and assets testing.

Income earned from the Disability Support Pension (blind) prior to retirement age is not classified as taxable income and does not need to be declared on your tax return. After an individual reaches retirement age, they may elect to remain on the Disability Support Pension (blind) or to transfer to the Age Pension. To find out which option might be best for your set of circumstances, please refer

to the article within this section entitled “Age Pension vs. Disability Support Pension (blind)”.

Education Entry Payment

If you are already receiving a payment such as the Disability Support Pension or Newstart Allowance and are enrolled in an approved course, you may be eligible to receive the Education Entry Payment to help cover your study costs. Your eligibility for this payment will be determined when you provide Centrelink with proof of enrolment in an approved course.

Essential Medical Equipment Payment

If you experience an increase in energy costs as a result of using essential medical equipment that is necessary to manage your disability or medical condition, you may be eligible for the Essential Medical Equipment Payment, which is paid on an annual basis.

Mobility Allowance

The Mobility Allowance is paid to people with a disability who experience difficulty accessing public transport. To qualify for this allowance, you must:

- Have a disability
- Be at least 16 years of age
- Be living in Australia
- Be an Australian citizen or hold permanent resident status
- Be engaged in a number of qualifying activities

Qualifying activities for this allowance include:

- Looking for work
- Volunteer work
- Paid employment
- Vocational training
- Independent living and life skills training

Mobility Allowance is not income and assets tested and the income you receive from the allowance is not classified as taxable income.

Newstart Allowance

If you are aged 22 or over and are currently looking for work, studying or training, you may be eligible to receive the Newstart allowance. If you have not yet completed year 12 or an equivalent Certificate II course, you will be required to undertake further training before being considered eligible for the Newstart Allowance.

Pensioner Education Supplement (PES)

The Pensioner Education Supplement is available to individuals already receiving a pension such as the Disability Support Pension, Disability Support Pension (blind) and the Carer Payment. The supplement aims to assist recipients with the cost of full or part-time study.

Rent Assistance

If you are already a Centrelink customer and are required to pay rent for your current place of accommodation, you may be eligible to receive extra financial help. The amount of support provided may vary depending on your circumstances, such as the amount of rent that you are required to pay and the number of people residing in the place of residence.

Sickness Allowance

This is a short-term allowance for people who are temporarily unable to work as a result of injury or illness. In some cases, this allowance may also be available to students who are enrolled in full-time study.

Telephone Allowance

If you already receive a qualifying pension, such as a Disability Support Pension, you may be eligible to receive the Telephone Allowance: a quarterly allowance that aims to assist with the cost of

maintaining a home phone and internet connection. Your eligibility for this allowance should be reviewed when you make a claim for other payments, however you may wish to contact the Department of Human Services for further information.

Utilities Allowance

If you already receive a qualifying pension, such as a Disability Support Pension, you may be eligible to receive the Utilities Allowance: a quarterly allowance that aims to assist with the cost of gas, electricity, water etc. Your eligibility for this allowance should be reviewed when you make a claim for other payments, however you may wish to contact the Department of Human Services for further information.

Youth Allowance

If you are 16 years of age and are enrolled in an apprenticeship, looking for full-time work, training, or are sick, you may be eligible to receive Youth Allowance. If you have not yet completed year 12 or an equivalent Certificate II course, you may be required to undertake further training to be considered eligible for the allowance. In some circumstances, Youth Allowance may also be paid to a student whose parents are on a limited income.

Youth Disability Supplement

If you already receive some support from Centrelink and you have a disability, you may be eligible to receive additional financial support through this supplement.

8. Health Benefits and Services

Allied Health Podiatry Service

This scheme is designed to increase access to podiatry services for people who may experience difficulty taking care of their feet, such as

the frail aged or some people with a disability. The scheme allows the individual five free podiatry visits per year.

To find out more about this scheme and obtain a referral, speak to your general practitioner.

Ambulance Fee Exemption

Holders of a Centrelink Pension Concession Card are entitled to free ambulance services within the state of New South Wales. If ambulance transport requires you to travel interstate, contact the relevant state ambulance service to discuss arrangements for concession card holders.

Essential Medical Equipment Payment

This is an annual payment that is provided to individuals who experience an increase in energy costs as a result of the essential medical equipment that is required to manage their disability or medical condition. For further information, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Health Care Card

The Health Care Card is designed to alleviate the cost of medication for low income earners and benefit recipients. Card holders may also be entitled to bulk bill GP appointments at the discretion of the doctor. For further information on the Health Care Card, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Hearing Service

Holders of a Pensioner Concession Card may be eligible to receive a hearing services voucher from the Office of Hearing Services. A voucher allows you to access a range of hearing services free of charge, including a comprehensive hearing assessment and the provision of an appropriate hearing aid if required.

Phone: 1800 500 726

Oral Health Care

Funded by NSW Government Area Health Services, eligible concession card holders are entitled to limited free oral health services. To find out more about free oral health care services for concession holders, contact your local hospital or public dental clinic.

Sickness Allowance

This is a short-term allowance for people who are temporarily unable to work as a result of injury or illness. In some cases, this allowance may also be available to students who are enrolled in full-time study. For further information, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

9. Housing Benefits and Services

Council Rate Concessions

Pension holders who own and occupy land are eligible for a concession on council rates and charges. If the land is owned by a number of people, a proportion of the concession may still be granted.

Some Council's may also grant deferment of rates; whereby rates accrue against the property and do not have to be paid until the

property is sold or transferred. Please contact your Local Council for more information.

Home and Community Care

This program provides basic maintenance and support services to the frail-aged and people with a disability to continue to live independently. Some of the services that can be provided include:

- Home modification and maintenance
- Nursing and allied health care
- Meal preparation and food care
- Domestic assistance
- Transport
- Respite
- Counselling and assessment

To find out more about the Home and Community Care program and how you can apply, contact Ageing, Disability and Homecare (ADHC) in the Department of Family and Community Services.

Phone: (02) 8270 2000

Website: www.adhc.nsw.gov.au

Housing NSW Home Modifications

Public housing residents who have identified a need for modifications to be made to the home can have modifications made free of charge where it is economically viable for Housing NSW to accommodate them. Modifications can greatly assist an individual to remain living independently and may include items such as handrails. Where it is not appropriate for modifications to be made to the home that the tenant resides in, they may be relocated to a suitable property. To find out more about home modifications, contact Housing NSW.

Phone: 1300 468 468

Website: www.housing.nsw.gov.au

10. Money Management

Cash Test

If you have trouble differentiating between the notes in your wallet, you can obtain a “cash test” from Blind Citizens Australia free of charge. The cash test is a small, portable plastic device which slips into your wallet and allows you to measure the length of the note using either Braille or tactile markings. As the different bank note denominations differ in length, this method allows you to independently determine what note you are holding.

LookTel Money Reader

LookTel Money Reader is an application that can be downloaded to your iPhone or iPod Touch which instantly recognises currency and speaks the denomination; enabling people to quickly and easily identify and count bills. Point the camera of your iOS device at a bill and the application will tell you the denomination in real-time. Twenty-one currencies are supported.

No Interest Loans Scheme

The No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS) exists to help individuals purchase or replace essential household items. Loans typically range between \$800 and \$1200 for the purchase of white goods, medical devices, furniture or any other essential household items.

Phone: 1800 509 994 (information on agencies operating NILS)

Website: www.nilsnsw.org.au

Talking Automatic Teller Machines (ATM)

Most of the major banks, such as the National Australia Bank, St George, Greater, ANZ and the Commonwealth Bank have started implementing talking ATMs for the benefit of consumers who are blind or vision impaired. You might like to contact your bank to see it

they have talking ATMs available and where these might be located. When using one of these machines, you simply need to take along a set of headphones and plug them into the headphone jack that is provided on the machine. You will then be given instructions on how to complete your transaction.

11. Sport

While it is still possible for people who are blind or vision impaired to participate in a range of different mainstream sporting and fitness activities, some of the below contacts may be of interest to anyone wishing to undertake training in a sport that is specifically targeted towards people who are blind or vision impaired. Phone numbers could not be provided for sporting groups as they change frequently, so if you are unable to access the website, contact the National Office of Blind Citizens Australia

Phone: 1800 033 660

Bowling

A game of blind bowls is very similar to the standard game. Each blind bowler has their own director to verbally explain distance, ball position etc. There are four different vision categories, so this game is not just for people who are totally blind. Blind Bowls is run by the Royal NSW Bowls Association.

Website: www.rnswba.org.au

Cricket

In a game of blind cricket, an audible ball with bells is used so that players are able to track its movement. Other minor adjustments to the game make it easier for people who are blind or vision impaired to play, but for the most part the game of blind cricket is not too different from the traditional game. There are three different vision categories, so this game is not just for people who are totally blind.

Website: www.blindcricket.com

Goal Ball

Goal Ball is a highly competitive sport for people who are blind which is played on an indoor court. There are three players on each team and the object of the game is to roll the ball past the other team without them stopping it. The ball has bells to make it easier for players to track its movement and all players are blindfolded to allow for varying levels of vision amongst players.

Website: www.goalball.com.au

Golf

In a game of blind golf, players strike the ball in the same way as sighted players. The most fundamental role is played by the blind golfer's caddie who acts as the golfer's eyes and describes distances, directions and other visual elements of the game. There are three different vision categories, so this game is not just for people who are totally blind.

Website: www.blindgolf.com.au

Horse Riding

Riding for the Disabled (RDA) aims to give people with a disability the opportunity to enjoy all of the benefits associated with horse riding. Horse riding can be both recreational and therapeutic and this organisation has a great deal of experience working with people who are blind or vision impaired.

Website: www.rdansw.org.au

Karate

Although many people who are blind or vision impaired, have successfully completed training in mainstream martial arts, Strathfield Seido Karate Dojo offers specialised classes for students who are blind or vision impaired. Once students become confident in the specialised class and understand the basic martial arts concepts and moves, they are free to join in with the other mainstream classes offered at the dojo.

Website: www.seidokazoku.com.au

Sailing

With a large number of clubs throughout NSW, Sailability aims to encourage and facilitate sailing and boating for people with a disability. Most Sailability clubs already have experience working with people who are blind or vision impaired and assisted them in developing their sailing skills, whether it is for competition or simply recreation.

Website: www.sailability.org/au/australia

Surfing

With several clubs on the South Coast of NSW, The Disabled Surfers' Association provides opportunities for social events, friendship and competition for anyone with a disability who wants to give surfing a go. The association has never had a person with any disability that they have not been able to help to enjoy surfing.

Website: www.disabledsurfers.org

Swish

Swish is a game for people who are blind or vision impaired that is played on a modified table tennis table. The table has a high centre-board that the ball can move underneath and side barriers that prevent the ball from going off the side of the table. The ball that is

used in swish is larger than a table tennis ball and has bells inside it so that players who are blind or vision impaired are able to track it when it is moving. The ball is rolled along the table, often at great speed, with the aim of rolling it off the opponent's end of the table. Players use a small paddle to defend their end of the table.

There is no formal swish club in NSW, but several offices of Vision Australia have a swish table and regularly allow clients to come along and enjoy a game. You can contact your local office of Vision Australia to see if they have a table available.

Phone: 1300 84 74 66

12. Telecommunications Benefits and Services

Phone Bills in Alternate Format

Some telecommunications providers such as Optus and Telstra provide phone bills in alternate formats.

- If you are with Telstra and would like to receive your bills in large print or Braille, phone 1800 068 424.
- If you are with Optus and would like to receive your bills in Braille, phone 13 30 66.
- If you are with another provider, contact them to enquire about bills in other formats.

Telstra Call Connect Fee Exemption

Unlike Telstra's Directory Assistance service, Call Connect will connect you to the number that you wish to dial. A service fee is usually charged for Call Connect calls, however eligible customers may be granted a fee exemption. Exemptions are only granted to customers who experience difficulty with dialling numbers on a standard telephone handset. To obtain an application form for a fee exemption contact Telstra's Disability Enquiry Hotline.

Phone: 1800 068 424

Telstra's Directory Assistance Helpline

Telstra operates a free directory assistance helpline for people who are unable to read or access a standard telephone directory. This is a live, operator-assisted service that includes both phone number information and address information. You will be given the phone number to take down but will not be connected to the number. To apply for this free service contact Telstra's Disability Enquiry Hotline.

Phone: 1800 068 424

13. Transport Benefits and Services

Community Transport

Community transport assists people with a disability and their carers for whom conventional public transport systems may not be an appropriate option. Community transport may provide transport for individuals with a disability for any of the following purposes:

- Recreation
- Shopping
- Medical care
- Social services

There are a number of Community transport providers throughout New South Wales and either individual or group transport may be available.

To find out more about the Community transport options available in your area, contact your local council or phone Transport for New South Wales.

Phone: (02) 8836 3100

Website: www.transport.nsw.gov.au

Great Southern Rail Service Concession

Great Southern Railway operates the Indian Pacific, the Overlander and the Ghan long distance rail services that provide transport between Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. There are generous concessions available for all of these services. For prices, phone Great Southern Railway and indicate that you are blind or vision impaired.

Phone: 13 21 47

Website: www.greatsouthernrail.com.au

Home and Community Care (HACC)

The HACC program provides basic maintenance and support services to the frail-aged and people with a disability. HACC provides a range of different supports, including transport assistance. To find out more about the Home and Community Care program, contact the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care.

Phone: (02) 8270 2000

Website: www.adhc.nsw.gov.au

Isolated Patients Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS)

IPTAAS is a non-means tested scheme that provides financial assistance to people who are required to travel long distances to access specialist medical care. To be eligible for the scheme, you need to travel at least 100 km one way, or a cumulative distance of at least 200 km from your place of residence to get to the nearest available medical specialist. To find out more, contact your local IPTAAS office or ask your general practitioner about the scheme.

Website: www.health.nsw.gov.au

Mobility Allowance

The Mobility Allowance is paid to people with a disability who experience difficulty accessing public transport. To qualify for this allowance, you must:

- Have a disability
- Be at least 16 years of age
- Be living in Australia
- Be an Australian citizen or hold permanent resident status
- Be engaged in a number of qualifying activities

Qualifying activities for this allowance include:

- Looking for work
- Volunteer work
- Paid employment
- Vocational training
- Independent living and life skills training

The Mobility Allowance is not income and assets tested and the income you receive from the allowance is not classified as taxable income. To find out more about the Mobility Allowance and how you can apply, contact the Department of Human Services.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.humanservices.gov.au

Mobility Parking Permit

The Mobility Parking Permit is granted to eligible recipients with mobility difficulties and entitles a person to the following:

- Full access to accessible parking spaces marked with a symbol for persons with a disability.
- Free parking in metered, ticketed or coupon areas.
- Ability to park for an unlimited length of time when there is a sign indicating parking for more than 30 minutes.
- Ability to park for a maximum of two hours in spaces that are time restricted to 30 minutes.

- Ability to park for 30 minutes in spaces that are time restricted to less than 30 minutes.
- Ability to park for five minutes in spaces that are marked as “No Parking” (driver must remain within three metres of the vehicle at all times).

To apply for a mobility parking permit, you will need to obtain an application form from your local Roads and Traffic Authority Office or download a copy of the form from www.rta.nsw.gov.au.

This form will need to be completed and returned to Roads and Maritime Services (previously known as the RTA) along with a statement from your medical practitioner, a current photograph and proof of identity.

Qantas Carer Concession Card

The Carer Concession Card is issued to people with a disability who require the assistance of a carer while travelling. Anyone who requires assistance with toileting, meals, or communicating with staff while on the plane, or who requires assistance when reaching their destination, is eligible.

The Carer Concession Card can only be used on domestic travel and entitles a person to 10% off their own fare (or 50% when travelling business class) and 50% off the fare of their nominated carer. For more information, contact Nican.

Phone: (02) 6241 1220

Website: www.nican.com.au

Taxi Transport Subsidies Scheme (TTSS)

This scheme is designed to alleviate the cost of transport for people who are unable to drive due to significant and permanent disability. The applicant is issued with booklets of vouchers which enable the holder to travel by taxi at half fair, with a maximum subsidy of \$30 per trip.

Phone: 1800 623 724

Website: www.transport.nsw.gov.au

Tools for transport

You can access transport information such as timetables and status updates, or plan a journey using the Transport for NSW info service.

Phone: 131 500

Website: www.transportnsw.info

App: visit the app store on your smart device to install and use the Transport Info app

There are also a range of other smart phone applications available that can provide timetable information and/or track your bus or train journey in real time. Not all of these applications have been tested to ensure that they are accessible. However in the event that an app is not accessible, please feel free to contact Blind Citizens Australia to discuss how this matter can be taken further.

i. Arrivo Sydney

Real-time, Bus departure and location information for Sydney Buses and Train location information for Sydney and NSW Trains. You can also see the location of nearby bus ticket sellers and tag trips to receive automatic alerts when you are near your stop.

ii. TransitTimes+

TransitTimes+ provides you with a trip planner, offline timetables, service alerts, and wheelchair accessibility information. You can download timetables for over 70 cities in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. Includes real-time bus information for Newcastle buses (STA) and Busways Blacktown services.

iii. Triptastic

Triptastic lets you see at a glance where you can go from your current location and the next available services to take you there. You can also explore interactive detailed maps for routes, stops and service frequencies.

iv. TripView Sydney

TripView is a smart phone application that displays Sydney Train/Bus/Ferry timetable data on your phone. It features a summary view showing your next services, as well as a full timetable viewer. All timetable data is stored on your phone, so it can be used offline. This application was fully accessible with VoiceOver when this information was last updated. To download the app now, visit the App store on your smart device.

Vision Impaired Person's Pass

This pass entitles the pass-holder to free transport on CityRail services, regular bus routes (government and private) and Sydney and Newcastle ferry services. Some private ferry services may also be covered depending on the operator. Additionally, pass holders are entitled to one free CountryLink service per calendar year and a half fare subsidy on long distance rail services within NSW.

To obtain an application form, contact the Transport for NSW Passes and Concessions Office.

Phone: 1300 548 828

Website: www.transport.nsw.gov.au

14. Utility Benefits and Services

Bills in Alternate Format

Some energy and water providers are able to provide bills in a range of different formats; including email, large print and hardcopy Braille. Speak to your provider to see if they offer this service and, if not, ask them if they would be willing to put measures in place so that they are able to accommodate your needs.

Energy Accounts Payment Assistance Scheme

Assistance is available for financially disadvantaged individuals who are experiencing difficulty paying their electricity bill due to crisis, through the Energy Accounts Payments Assistance Scheme (EAPA). Payments are not ongoing and assistance provided will be dependent on an assessment of needs by a charitable organisation. To find out about the scheme, contact the Energy Information Line.

Phone: 1300 136 888

Website: www.trade.nsw.gov.au

Energy Bill Concessions

The New South Wales Government provides an energy concession to holders of a Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card. This concession is granted to individuals who have energy supplied for domestic use only at their primary place of residence. Although it is paid through electricity bills, it does cover other forms of energy. Please contact your energy provider for more information.

Smoke Alarm and Battery Replacement

The NSW Fire Service urges anyone who is unable to change the batteries in their smoke alarm to contact their nearest fire station on an annual basis to receive assistance free of charge. If your smoke alarm starts to emit a chirping sound, this indicates that the battery level is low and you should contact your nearest fire station immediately to have it replaced.

If your smoke alarm needs to be replaced, you will need to provide the battery-operated smoke alarm for installation by the fire fighter. If requesting a replacement battery for an existing smoke alarm, you will be required to provide the battery.

Water Bill Rebate

Some concession card holders may be eligible for a rebate on their water bills. If you are experiencing financial hardship, other

arrangements such as extended payment periods or hardship vouchers may be provided. Contact your local water authority for more information.

15. Other

Articles for the Blind

Australia Post will deliver eligible items identified as being used to aid the blind for free or at concessional rates. All parcels must be mailed by or to either an individual who is blind or an organisation that is recognised as serving people who are blind.

Eligible items include:

- Documentation that are written in Braille
- Aids for the teaching of Braille
- Special paper used to produce Braille
- Any form of speech recording to be used by the blind

All letters and parcels under 7kg are delivered free of charge. These items must include either an “Articles for the Blind” label which can be obtained from Australia Post, or must have the words “Material for the Blind” or a similar label clearly printed on the packaging. For further information, contact Australia Post.

Free Photo Identification

The NSW Photo ID Card, issued by Service NSW is a voluntary card for people who do not hold a current NSW driver licence. It may be used to help access a number of everyday services such as sending or receiving international mail, opening bank accounts and entering licensed premises. While there is usually an administration fee associated with this card, cards are issued to eligible pensioners free of charge. To find out more about the NSW Photo Card or to obtain an application, visit your nearest Service NSW centre.

Website: <http://www.service.nsw.gov.au/>